

Interrelations Between Communication Strategies, Social Capital, and Community Participation in Islamic Educational Institutions:

A Case Study of PPT Nurul Musthofa Tabalong

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the interaction between communication strategies, social capital, and public participation in an Islamic educational institution, using the Nurul Musthofa Integrated Islamic Boarding School in Tabalong, South Kalimantan, as a case study. The research is motivated by increasingly intense competition among Islamic educational institutions in the digital era and by the limited number of studies that examine planned, integrated, and long-term communication practices that are explicitly oriented toward social engagement and community participation. This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design through in-depth interviews with pesantren leaders, media teams, and community figures, participant observation, and analysis of communication and promotional media documentation. The theoretical framework combines Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) to examine the integration of face-to-face communication channels, religious activities, social media, and community networks; Rogers' diffusion of innovation theory to explain the role of religious opinion leaders in disseminating messages; and Putnam's social capital theory to understand how trust, networks, and norms of reciprocity are mobilized into concrete forms of participation. The findings reveal a hybrid, IMC-based communication strategy that combines charismatic preaching in religious study groups, digital communication via Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp, and socio-religious events such as student graduations and large-scale religious gatherings. The interaction between these communication strategies and existing social capital increases the visibility of the pesantren, the number of new students, financial and infrastructural support, and broader community participation. Furthermore, communication practices are positioned as instruments of da'wah and social empowerment because they are consistently linked to values of charity, education, and religious collaboration. The study recommends a community-based IMC model that maintains religious authority as opinion leaders, strengthens internal media capacity, and develops a structured calendar of public activities to sustain participation, making the model replicable for other Islamic educational institutions.

KEYWORDS: Islamic education, promotion of Islamic boarding schools, community participation, social capital, diffusion of innovation.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), as major Islamic educational institutions, play a central role in shaping the character, spirituality, and social competence of Indonesian society. Historically, pesantren have served not only as centers for the transmission of classical Islamic knowledge but also as agents of cultural and social transformation that contribute to the formation of national morality (Dhofier, 2011). However, the dynamics of globalization and rapid developments in information technology have reshaped how communities interact with educational institutions, creating new challenges for pesantren in sustaining their relevance, maintaining public trust, and strengthening their social roles (Azra, 2019; Mahfud, 2020).

In this shifting landscape, pesantren must not only innovate in curriculum and pedagogy but also strengthen their institutional communication. Communication strategies now play a crucial part in shaping public perceptions, articulating institutional identity, facilitating da'wah, and mobilizing community support. Such strategies are not merely promotional tools, but constitute forms of communication that reinforce Islamic values, social cohesion, and institutional legitimacy (Suyadi, 2013; Wahid, 2003; Arifin, 2016). Because pesantren operate within strong social, religious, and kinship networks, their communication practices are inseparable from the social capital that surrounds them. Social capital—understood as networks of trust, reciprocity, and shared norms—becomes the foundation upon which pesantren build relationships and foster community participation (Putnam, 2000).

Despite the centrality of communication in pesantren life, scholarly attention has not sufficiently examined how communication strategies, social capital, and community participation interact within Islamic educational institutions. Existing literature on pesantren tends to emphasize historical development, curriculum, and socio-religious functions (Azra, 2019; Mujani & Burhani, 2020), while studies that explicitly analyze the interplay between communication practices and community engagement remain limited. Furthermore, local contexts—such as South Kalimantan, where charismatic religious leaders and strong kinship structures shape communication patterns—are underexplored (Sakdiah, 2021; Rahman, 2020). This gap indicates the need for research that investigates how pesantren communication strategies operate within and through local social capital to mobilize community participation.

To address this gap, this study employs an embedded qualitative case study focusing on PPT Nurul Musthofa Tabalong. This approach enables an in-depth analysis of the interrelations between institutional communication strategies, existing social capital, and various forms of community participation. The study examines how pesantren messages, communication channels, interpersonal interactions, religious activities, and the authority of charismatic leaders such as Guru Jaro contribute to building trust and mobilizing community support. These interactions can be seen in the community's involvement in religious celebrations, collaborative infrastructure development, and voluntary contributions of funds, labor, and socio-religious participation. Such phenomena highlight that communication within pesantren is not merely informational, but embedded in cultural values, mutual cooperation, and social bonds.

Academically, this study makes three key contributions. First, it expands the application of communication theory and social capital theory to the context of Islamic educational institutions, offering a conceptual model that explains how communication strategies and social capital shape patterns of community participation. Second, it advances methodological rigor by triangulating multi-stakeholder interviews, participant observation, and communication media analysis to capture the dynamics of pesantren communication grounded in da'wah and community engagement. Third, it provides practical insights for Islamic educational institutions to design communication practices that strengthen trust, mobilize participation, and enhance institutional sustainability. By highlighting the interrelations between communication strategies, social capital, and community participation, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how pesantren maintain their social role and adapt to contemporary challenges in Indonesia.

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) offers a relevant strategic framework for understanding how Islamic educational institutions design and manage their communication strategies across multiple stakeholders and channels. Conceptually, IMC is defined as the process of planning, implementing, and evaluating coordinated communications across tools and media in order to produce consistent messages, build brand equity, and drive measurable behavioral responses while optimizing resources (Belch & Belch, 2021; Schultz & Schultz, 2004). In the context of Islamic boarding schools, IMC is not synonymous with commercial advertising, but rather the orchestration

of da'wah (Islamic outreach), academic information, public services, and community relations based on Islamic values—honesty, trustworthiness, and public welfare—so that institutional communication runs parallel to educational functions and moral development.

The strength of IMC lies in narrative consistency and synergy across communication touchpoints. Islamic boarding schools engage diverse stakeholders—prospective students and parents, alumni, religious leaders, village officials, donors, MSME partners, and local governments—who receive information through multiple channels, ranging from religious lectures and face-to-face meetings to WhatsApp and social media. IMC literature confirms that message consistency across channels enhances the clarity of the value proposition, reduces audience confusion, and strengthens institutional associations and trust (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015; Kotler & Keller, 2016). In practice, this consistency may take the form of a persistent emphasis on curricular excellence, integrity of governance, student achievements, and transparency regarding fees and scholarships, which is then communicated through community outreach, alumni testimonials, and documentation of socio-religious activities.

From a behavioral communication perspective, IMC operates through cognitive–affective–conative stages as proposed by hierarchy-of-effects models such as AIDA and the Lavidge–Steiner model. Awareness is generated through repeated and relevant exposure; interest is fostered via educational content that addresses parental concerns; evaluation is facilitated through two-way channels such as Q&A sessions, school visits, and cost consultations; action is realized through enrollment or participation; and advocacy occurs when student guardians and alumni become informal communicators within their social networks (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961; Strong, 1925). A persuasive approach that combines central-route processing the quality of arguments and evidence with peripheral cues such as the authority of the kyai, the credibility of local opinion leaders, and social proof amplifies message effectiveness, particularly in communities where religious figures hold high symbolic capital (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In that sense, communication strategies that present measurable data (e.g., graduation rates, competition achievements, transparent financial reports) alongside credible religious role models are more likely to stimulate participation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design as described by Yin (2014). This approach was chosen because the research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the interrelations between communication strategies, social capital, and forms of community participation at the Nurul Musthofa Integrated Islamic Boarding School in Tabalong, South Kalimantan. A case study design enables the researcher to examine phenomena contextually in complex, real-life situations, where the dynamics of institutional communication in pesantren cannot be separated from the surrounding social, cultural, and religious structures (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through this approach, the study seeks to understand the meanings behind the actions, messages, and communication processes carried out by the institution in building and sustaining community involvement.

The research site was determined at the Nurul Musthofa Integrated Islamic Boarding School (PPT Nurul Musthofa) because this institution is known to actively develop socio-religious communication activities and maintains close, ongoing interaction with the community. The research subjects included: (1) pesantren leaders as strategic decision makers related to communication and public engagement; (2) the media and public relations team responsible for planning and implementing communication activities across offline and digital channels; and (3) community leaders and student guardians who play a critical role in strengthening social capital and community participation. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on the researcher's assessment of individuals who possess a deep understanding of the phenomena under study and are able to provide rich, relevant data (Patton, 2015). The number of informants was not predetermined but was adjusted according to data needs until reaching the point of saturation, namely when no significantly new information emerged.

Data were collected using three main techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore informants' perceptions, experiences, and strategies regarding institutional communication, trust-building, and community participation. Participant observation focused on communication practices and socio-religious interactions within the pesantren environment, including da'wah activities, Islamic holiday events, public gatherings, and routine interactions between the pesantren and the surrounding community. All observations were recorded in field notes and structured observation sheets to ensure consistency in data recording. Documentation study was conducted by reviewing institutional archives, printed communication materials (such as brochures, banners, and event leaflets), and digital content, including social media posts and activity reports, which reflect how the pesantren presents itself and interacts with its stakeholders across communication channels. Throughout the research, the researcher functioned as the primary instrument (human instrument), directing the focus of data collection using interview guides, observation protocols, and documentation checklists.

Data analysis was carried out interactively and iteratively following the model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data condensation involved selecting, simplifying, and organizing raw data into thematic categories related to communication strategies, social capital, and community participation. The condensed data were then displayed in narrative form to reveal patterns and relationships among categories, which formed the basis for emerging interpretations. Conclusions were not drawn in a single step but were continuously reviewed and refined through reflection and comparison across data sources until a comprehensive and credible understanding of the phenomenon was achieved.

To ensure data validity, the study employed triangulation of sources, techniques, and time, as suggested by Denzin (2012). Triangulation was carried out by comparing information from different informants (leaders, media team, community representatives), cross-checking results from interviews, observations, and documentation, and conducting repeated observations at different times. Member checking was also conducted by confirming key interpretations with selected informants to ensure that the researcher's understanding was aligned with the realities experienced by participants.

All stages of the study were conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of social research. The researcher obtained informed consent from each informant, guaranteed the confidentiality of participants' identities, and ensured that participation was voluntary. Research activities were carried out with due regard for prevailing social norms, local culture, and Islamic values within the pesantren environment (Bryman, 2016). This methodological design thus provides a robust foundation for comprehensively exploring how the communication strategies of PPT Nurul Musthofa interact with existing social capital to foster and sustain community participation in the surrounding area.

RESULTS

1. Communication Strategies Implemented

Findings from interviews, observations, and document analysis show that PPT Nurul Musthofa implements a hybrid communication strategy that combines interpersonal communication, digital communication, and socio-religious event-based communication. This integration forms the core of the institution's efforts to maintain trust, strengthen social capital, and mobilize community participation.

Interpersonal communication remains the pesantren's strongest modality. Regular religious studies (majelis taklim), preaching activities, and direct visits by pesantren leaders—especially the charismatic figure of Guru Jaro—serve as primary channels for building moral legitimacy and emotional closeness with the community. Field data indicate that the presence of Guru Jaro in religious gatherings substantially increases community attendance and enhances trust in the pesantren. This aligns with Putnam's (2000) social capital theory, which emphasizes that trusted figures and shared norms strengthen networks of cooperation. In this context, interpersonal communication functions as the foundation for trust-building rooted in local culture, kinship, and generational ties.

Digital communication represents the pesantren's adaptation to contemporary information behavior. Documentation shows that Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp groups are consistently used to disseminate activity updates, religious messages, and information about school programs. Posts featuring daily student activities and religious moments garner high interaction through comments and shares from guardians and alumni. This supports Dwivedi et al. (2021), who assert that digital media enhances public engagement through its speed and interactivity. For PPT Nurul Musthofa, digital channels reinforce transparency, broaden reach, and position the institution as responsive to social change.

Communication through socio-religious events also serves as a powerful medium for cultivating participation. Events such as graduations, major religious gatherings, and community service programs act as public communication arenas where thousands of community members interact directly with the institution. Observations show that these events serve dual purposes: showcasing educational achievements and reinforcing institutional legitimacy. This finding corresponds with Maringe's (2006) argument that educational communication must also connect with cultural and emotional dimensions.

Overall, the combination of interpersonal, digital, and event-based communication demonstrates a holistic communication model. This model reflects Rogers' (2003) innovation diffusion theory, where pesantren leaders, digital media, and community networks jointly disseminate messages and values. Empirically, this strategy has expanded the pesantren's visibility, strengthened its social legitimacy, and broadened its network of supporters beyond the Tabalong region.

2. Benefits of Communication Strategies

The implementation of integrated communication strategies generates several benefits that strengthen both institutional capacity and community relationships. One of the clearest benefits is the annual increase in student enrollment. Since adopting structured digital communication alongside interpersonal engagement, the pesantren has experienced a consistent rise in registrants. This reflects Rogers' (2003) view that trusted opinion leaders accelerate acceptance of institutional messages.

A second benefit is the heightened involvement of parents and community members. Guardians contribute not only financially but also through voluntary labor, active participation in events, and informal word-of-mouth communication. This pattern reinforces Putnam's (2000) argument that high social trust and dense networks promote collective action. The emotional bonds fostered by personal communication and community-oriented events have created long-term loyalty to the institution.

The pesantren's communication strategies also strengthen its visibility and recognition beyond the local region. Public participation in widely publicized events enhances the institution's image as both an educational center and a da'wah institution. This finding aligns with Maringe (2006), who notes that effective educational communication constructs institutional identity in the public sphere. Hybrid communication merging digital and interpersonal channels produces dual advantages. Digital media expands reach and participation, while interpersonal communication maintains emotional depth and legitimacy. Testimonials, comments, and shared content from alumni and guardians further extend organic communication networks, amplifying institutional credibility.

3. Impact of Communication Strategies on Community Participation

The impact of communication strategies is particularly evident in the robust forms of community participation observed at PPT Nurul Musthofa. The steady increase in student enrollments from both within and outside South Kalimantan reflects strengthened public trust and expanded influence across regions.

Community support extends beyond enrollment. Interviews reveal active participation in constructing and maintaining school facilities, such as classrooms, dormitories, and public areas. External organizations—including local government units and religious institutions—also provide financial and infrastructural assistance. These forms of participation indicate that communication strategies strengthen reciprocal relationships and reinforce the institution's social legitimacy. This supports Putnam's (2000) assertion that social capital can be mobilized into material and collective support.

Socio-religious events function as major nodes of participation, drawing thousands of attendees. These events create a shared public space where community members, students, and leaders engage in social, religious, and cultural interactions. Such engagement aligns with Arnstein's (1969) "ladder of participation," where symbolic participation evolves into substantial and collaborative involvement. The overall pattern demonstrates a mutually reinforcing relationship: effective communication builds trust, trust strengthens social capital, and social capital produces sustained community participation. Participation, in turn, provides feedback that reinforces the pesantren's communication practices, creating a positive cycle that supports institutional resilience and growth.

4. Communication as Da'wah and Social Empowerment

Findings show that the pesantren positions communication not merely as institutional messaging but as an extension of its da'wah mission. Communication activities function as mechanisms for disseminating Islamic values, strengthening social networks, and raising awareness of religiously rooted education. Within the framework of *da'wah bil hal*, communication also expresses practical Islamic values through social activities, community service, and empowerment programs (Rohman, 2019).

Communication practices significantly strengthen the institution's social capital. Through sustained relational engagement, the pesantren builds both bonding social capital (internal solidarity) and bridging social capital (outward connections with external actors), confirming Putnam's (2000) two-tier social capital structure. Communication that emphasizes collaboration, transparency, and shared religious values fosters a community sense of ownership and belonging.

In the era of digital transformation and Society 5.0, communication-based da'wah becomes a strategic necessity. PPT Nurul Musthofa integrates digital media, community programs, alumni networks, and socio-religious events to expand its da'wah reach. Such communication practices not only increase community participation but also reinforce the pesantren's role as a center of social transformation.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that the promotional strategy implemented by the Nurul Musthofa Integrated Islamic Boarding School has significant implications for increasing community participation. The finding that the number of new students increases annually confirms the relevance of promotion as a managerial instrument in Islamic education. This is in line with the view of Kotler and Keller (2016) who stated that promotion is an integral part of a marketing strategy that not only functions to introduce the institution, but also builds its image and expands public trust. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, interpersonal promotion based on charismatic figures such as

Guru Jaro acts as an opinion leader who facilitates the process of adoption of values and legitimacy of the institution, as outlined in the theory of diffusion of innovation by Rogers (2003).

The combination of digital promotion through social media and traditional promotion through religious activities has proven to create an effective hybrid model for expanding reach while maintaining community loyalty. A study by Setiawan (2024) showed that social media is a strategic arena for promoting Islamic educational institutions, but still requires an adaptive ideological narrative. The results of this study demonstrate that Nurul Musthofa successfully utilized digital media to increase the visibility and transparency of Islamic boarding school activities, while interpersonal strategies ensured emotional closeness and symbolic legitimacy. This reinforces the findings of Dwivedi et al. (2021) that digital strategies can accelerate information dissemination, but long-term impact is still determined by the social connectedness built interpersonally.

Community participation in the form of financial support, infrastructure development, and involvement in socio-religious activities demonstrates that promoting Islamic boarding schools not only results in an increase in the number of students but also strengthens the institution's social legitimacy. This is consistent with Putnam's (2000) theory of social capital, where trust and social networks are key assets in building collective action. The active participation of student guardians and the community in supporting Islamic boarding schools also aligns with the findings of Munir and Aini (2021), who emphasized the importance of community involvement in developing community-based Islamic education. Thus, the promotional strategy at Nurul Musthofa is not only a communication tool but also a social empowerment mechanism that strengthens the collective support base.

Furthermore, this study found that promotions carried out by Islamic boarding schools do not stand alone but are integrated within a cultural da'wah framework. Every form of promotion—whether through digital media, social activities, or informal interactions—is always accompanied by religious messages containing moral and spiritual values. For example, during each large-scale religious study group (Koran) activity, Islamic boarding schools not only use the momentum to introduce educational programs but also to instill the values of brotherhood, social responsibility, and independence. This strategy demonstrates how promotions can serve a dual purpose: disseminating information about the institution while strengthening the community's collective awareness of the importance of Islamic education. According to Hidayat (2021), Islamic boarding schools that make promotions part of their da'wah activities are able to maintain public trust because their approach is not commercial, but rather socio-religious.

Furthermore, field findings demonstrate that the Nurul Musthofa Integrated Islamic Boarding School has successfully utilized promotion to expand its social partnership network. The school collaborates with various government agencies, religious organizations, and community groups in the form of social activities, training, and non-formal education services. This pattern demonstrates that promotion at Nurul Musthofa is not only directed at prospective students and their guardians, but also to the wider community as partners in da'wah and empowerment. Through these activities, promotion serves as a collaborative medium connecting the boarding school with the external community. This supports Putnam's (2000) concept of bridging social capital, which is the ability of an institution to build bridges of trust across social groups to achieve broader collective goals.

Other findings indicate that da'wah-based promotional activities also have an impact on strengthening the character of students and the surrounding community. Internally, students are actively involved in various promotional activities such as social media management, activity publications, and guest services. This involvement trains them in public communication, institutional management, and social responsibility. Meanwhile, externally, the community feels more involved because promotions are carried out in a participatory and transparent manner. This creates a relationship of mutual trust, where the community is not simply the recipient of information, but rather part of the social network that supports the sustainability of the Islamic boarding school. This model also demonstrates that promotion can be a means of character education that aligns with the mission of Islamic da'wah (Wibowo, 2022).

In terms of social impact, Nurul Musthofa's promotions encourage community solidarity and mutual cooperation in supporting the development of Islamic boarding schools. For example, mutual cooperation activities for the construction of student dormitories and educational donations are tangible forms of social participation triggered by da'wah-based promotions. The success of Islamic boarding schools in inviting the community to participate voluntarily demonstrates that promotions embodying values of sincerity and togetherness are more effective than commercial strategies that emphasize profit. This aligns with Maringe's (2006) view, which asserts that the success of educational institution promotions is determined by the ability to build strong emotional connections and social values with the community.

Finally, the findings of this study confirm that the promotion carried out by the Nurul Musthofa Integrated Islamic Boarding School has not only impacted institutional growth but also the social transformation of the surrounding community. Promotion is carried out as part of a cultural missionary mission that fosters religious values, strengthens social solidarity, and creates a sustainable empowerment space. This strategy makes the Islamic boarding school not just an educational institution, but also a center for moral and social development that is adaptive to changing times. By combining traditional and modern approaches, the Islamic boarding school's promotion has succeeded in creating a productive, participatory, and community-oriented missionary and empowerment ecosystem.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the communication strategies implemented by PPT Nurul Musthofa Tabalong form a hybrid model that interrelates interpersonal, digital, and socio-religious communication in ways that significantly strengthen social capital and community participation. Interpersonal communication anchored in the charismatic leadership of Guru Jaro, the systematic use of social media, and the organization of large-scale religious and social activities jointly construct a coherent communicative ecosystem that builds trust, reinforces institutional legitimacy, and sustains long-term engagement.

Empirically, these interrelated strategies are reflected in the steady increase in student enrollment, growing financial and infrastructural support from the community and external institutions, and the active involvement of guardians and local communities in pesantren programs. These patterns affirm key insights from diffusion of innovation theory, social capital theory, and educational communication studies, which highlight the centrality of strategic communication, trusted opinion leaders, and dense social networks in enabling collective action and institutional sustainability.

Thus, the findings confirm that communication in Islamic boarding schools should not be understood merely as an instrument for visibility or promotion, but as an integrated mechanism of da'wah and social empowerment. By nurturing trust, reciprocity, and shared values, communication strategies at PPT Nurul Musthofa contribute to the formation of robust social capital, which in turn underpins community participation and supports the long-term sustainability of Islamic educational institutions in the contemporary era.

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